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Director of Central Intelligence

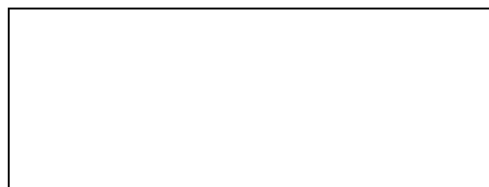
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY

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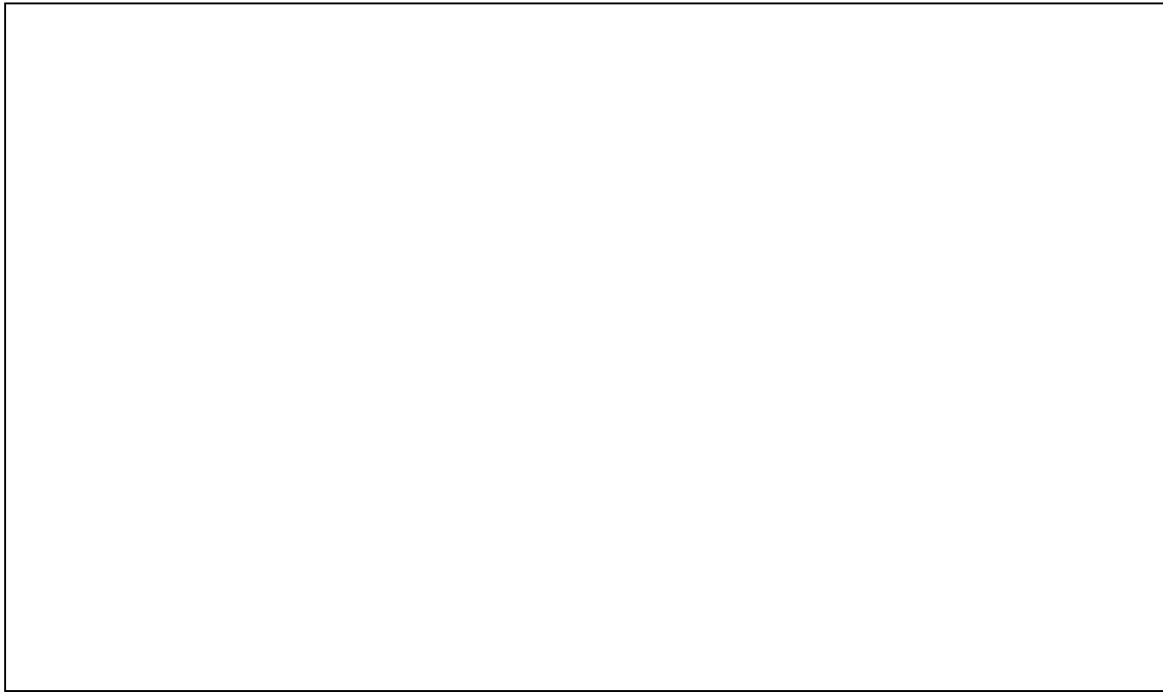
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Special Analyses

El Salvador: Military Capabilities of Both Sides

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Special Analysis

EL SALVADOR: Military Capabilities of Both Sides

The Salvadoran insurgents, mindful of the political gains to be made by continuing to demonstrate their military viability, are maintaining pressure in the capital. Although a renewed large-scale offensive cannot be ruled out, they are more likely to continue high-profile attacks in selected areas, particularly San Salvador. The armed forces, having borne the brunt of the rebels' nationwide attacks, now appear to be reacting to guerrilla initiatives. []

Rebel commanders probably believe continued attacks are necessary to preserve their credibility with both foreign supporters and the FMLN rank and file, to make the government look weak, and to provoke a rightwing backlash that would drive a wedge between Washington and San Salvador. They probably hope as well to strengthen their negotiating position for when talks eventually resume and to make Washington reconsider military aid to San Salvador by showing that the war is "unwinnable." []

The insurgents have not yet withdrawn to their base areas along the northern border with Honduras, choosing to maintain substantial forces around the capital and other major cities. []

The rebels also may mass their forces for an attempt to overrun a key military facility. The FMLN has not managed to carry out such an operation since early 1987, but its chances for success probably have improved with the acquisition of the SA-7. The seizure or destruction of an Army base, using SA-7 missiles to stave off government air support, would give the FMLN a major tactical and propaganda victory. []

Manpower Losses

The FMLN took heavy casualties—the Salvadoran Army claims nearly 1,700 rebels were killed and at least 1,093 wounded—but reports [] suggest many of the casualties were hastily trained militia, new conscripts, and front group members who swelled the ranks of the 6,000- to 7,000-man insurgent force during

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the recent offensive. Although some low-level commanders reportedly have been killed or captured, the senior leadership has remained safely in Managua during the recent fighting. []

Supply Situation

The FMLN's ability to pre-position sufficient supplies in the capital to sustain the offensive is one of its most significant achievements. There are no indications the rebels are running low on weapons or ammunition, although some units probably are short of food and medicine. The armed forces, acting on information from captured rebels, has captured several caches, which may hinder—but not halt—future FMLN operations. []

Status of Government Forces

The Army has deployed most of its units to root out rebel enclaves in the capital and other cities and to defend fixed installations rather than to pursue and strike the highly mobile insurgents. The military's strategic reserves were used during the offensive, and many units were pulled from the field to reinforce the capital. Some Army units in the capital apparently have been partially successful in blocking rebel movements in and out of the city, but unfamiliarity with urban tactics and concern about civilian casualties have impeded their efforts. []

Outlook

Even if regular FMLN units return to their bases soon, some urban commandos almost certainly will remain in the capital—the normal complement is about 500—to continue terrorism, harassment, and sabotage. The FMLN almost certainly will continue to try to assassinate key officials and their families in an effort to provoke a rightwing backlash and to destabilize the government. If the rebels succeed in assassinating certain leaders, such as President Cristiani or Army Chief Ponce—guerrilla snipers reportedly fired at the President's house Wednesday night—they may be able to take advantage of the resulting confusion to rally their forces for a new large-scale offensive. []

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